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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: CSCE: The View from Moscow

Overview

The route to the European Security Conference has been longer and bumpier than the Soviets anticipated, and they were forced to yield more than they wanted. Moscow never wavered, however, in its efforts to bring the conference to a close, and from its perspective the journey has been worthwhile.

With some justification, the Soviets can view the successful conclusion of the conference as a triumph for their diplomacy. It was Moscow that:

-- originated the idea of a conference more than 20 years ago;

-- doggedly and persistently brought along reluctant Western and neutral nations;

-- will gain more credit than anyone else for having persuaded the heads of 35 nations to come to Helsinki in the name of European security;

-- for party chief Brezhnev, in particular, it will be a welcome accomplishment only six months before the next, and probably his last, party congress.

What else does Moscow get out of the conference? It gets recognition of:

-- the idea that the Soviet Union has a legitimate voice in determining the future of Europe -- East and West;

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-- *the benign development of detente in Europe, in which CSCE marks completion of a stage in an ongoing process of ordering Europe's political, military and economic relationships in ways that are, not incidentally, amenable to Soviet interests.*

The Soviets will draw special satisfaction from having their conference at a time when Communists are making inroads in Italy and Portugal because the West did not make developments in those countries a hostage to detente in Europe. Moscow will see support for its contention that there is no inconsistency between detente and the development of progressive or revolutionary forces.

These Soviet "gains" derive, in a sense, from the process of CSCE rather than from any specific wording of the document to be signed by the heads of state. In that document, the only statement that speaks to a key Soviet objective is the "Basket I" principle that the present boundaries in Europe are inviolable. Moscow will regard this principle as universal recognition that the post-World War II borders in Europe, including the division of Germany are legitimate; it is clear that without such a statement Moscow would not have bought the rest of the document.

Implications of Inviolable Borders

What exactly this wording does for the Soviets is another matter. Nothing will change on the ground in Europe. The CSCE document does not carry the force of "legal" obligation, and the "inviolability principle" does not go beyond what West Germany has already conceded in its Eastern treaties. In addition, the Soviets were compelled by Bonn to agree to language in the CSCE documents that provides for the possibility of "peaceful change" in Europe -- so the inviolability of the borders is something less than immutable.

The reason for Moscow's 20-year quest for inviolable frontiers in Eastern Europe rests in the Soviet sense of insecurity -- a concern greater than would seem appropriate given the military balance in Europe, but nonetheless real. If the putative Soviet achievements at CSCE all seem to be in the area of atmosphere, psychology, and perception, that makes them no less concrete or meaningful to Moscow.

The Soviets made a number of concessions in the wording of the CSCE agreement, but it may end up that none was as significant as the unwritten obligation they assumed. The kinds of gains the Soviets have made at CSCE are only exploitable if the atmosphere remains undisturbed in Europe and Soviet behavior remains within the limits of acceptability. While no one would argue that CSCE will prevent the Soviets from taking any action that they considered vital to their interests, the CSCE atmosphere could have an effect on how Moscow weighs the pros and cons of any significant destabilizing action. There will almost certainly be differences within the Soviet leadership and between the USSR and the West over what is permissible, and the burden will be on the West to keep the margins as narrow as possible.

The Soviets also made some significant concessions to get CSCE. Before the conference began, Moscow had to:

-- work out a satisfactory agreement on Berlin;

-- accept US and Canadian participation;

-- agree to enter the force reduction talks (MBFR).

In the conference itself, they were compelled to accept the idea that a CSCE agreement would include more than a statement of amorphous principles, indeed would cover tangible areas of considerable sensitivity to a closed society. There is good ground for skepticism about the practical consequences of the Soviet concessions of freer movement of peoples and ideas (the so-called Basket III) and the military related "confidence building measures" (CBMs). Nonetheless, the Soviets have, for the first time, accepted the principle that such matters are a legitimate concern of the European community and a legitimate part of "European security."

Basket III

CSCE was made possible when the participants agreed to trade recognition of the inviolability of frontiers for improvements in the "freer movement of people and ideas." In a sense, this represented an exchange of present realities for future possibilities. The West calculated that, while it was indicating some degree of acceptance of Europe's division, it might at the same time set in motion processes that could eventually attentuate that division.

The Soviets did everything possible, short of scuttling the conference, to minimize their obligations under Basket III. In long months of tough bargaining, the West gradually retreated from its more far-reaching objectives. Most of the surviving provisions in Basket III are couched in terms of intent rather than obligation. The operative verbs are usually "intend," "hope," "encourage," "facilitate," "study." The Soviets consistently, and successfully, opposed the verb "will."

Furthermore, many of the Basket III articles contain escape hatches for the Soviets. For example, the provision on improved working conditions for journalists, contains a clause on the non-expulsion of journalists engaged in professional activity, but it adds the proviso that their activity must be "legitimate." In the Soviet Union, the Soviets will determine what is legitimate and what is not.

The texts in Basket III are divided into two broad categories: "human contacts" and "information." In

assessing the risks involved, however, the Soviets probably employed a different breakdown, distinguishing between provisions affecting Soviet citizens directly and those concerning the activity of foreigners in the Soviet Union. In the first category are statements dealing with family reunification, marriage between nationals of different states, travel, radio broadcasting, and other activities related to the dissemination of information. The second category consists primarily of improved working conditions for journalists, although items such as travel and tourism also fall into this category.

The Soviets negotiated hard to neutralize the impact of both texts, but if past experience is a guide they will be more concerned about provisions affecting Soviet citizens. The article facilitating marriage between nationals of different states is not likely to be particularly troublesome because the number of cases will probably remain small. The provisions dealing with family reunification and "contacts and regular meetings on the basis of family ties" may be more difficult because of increased emigration in recent years. Basket III does not in any way, however, obligate the Soviets actually to increase the flow of emigrants. Furthermore, these provisions, as well as clauses having to do with travel, tourism, contacts among professional and religious groups, and other similar subjects, are well covered by Soviet laws and there is little doubt that Moscow will apply these laws to whatever degree is necessary to maintain its control.

On radio broadcasting, the CSCE text does little more than apply pressure on the Soviets to refrain from reinstituting the jamming of Western broadcasts. Moscow stopped most jamming just as the second stage of CSCE was beginning, obviously in an effort to eliminate the topic as a source of contention and entice the West with the prospect of further gains at CSCE as well as in various bilateral relationships.

The Basket III provisions are not likely to affect the Soviet political order, nor are they likely to touch the lives or the imagination of the Russian people. They will, however, raise certain problems. Any tough Soviet statements or actions against individuals whose plight gets attention in the West will be viewed as a violation

of the spirit, if not the letter, of CSCE. There is a good chance that Soviet dissidents will seize on some of the CSCE provisions to argue their cases. Resort to legalisms or the various escape clauses in the CSCE document will not get the Soviets completely off the hook. In short, the Soviets are somewhat more vulnerable to the cause celebre than they were before CSCE. Western publicity will be the main weapon in the arsenal of Soviet citizens seeking greater personal freedom. CSCE did not create this relationship; but it may reinforce it.

Confidence Building Measures

At the beginning of the conference, the Soviets strongly opposed the concept of "confidence building measures." They argued that military matters had no place in the conference, and they fought bitterly against the key CBM of advance notification of maneuvers. In the closing weeks of the conference they carried their objections to the point of successfully defying Western efforts to extend the area of application of this measure another 25 km. Yet in the end the Soviets accepted the measures with relative ease and even came forth with an unexpected concession on notification of military movements, a topic that had been considered hopelessly deadlocked.

The agreement on advance notification of maneuvers provides that notification shall be given 21 days in advance of maneuvers involving 25,000 or more men anywhere in Europe and in a 250-km. zone from the USSR's borders with other participating states. As a condition to their agreement, the Soviets insisted that the notification be given on a voluntary basis. This means that, theoretically, the Soviets do not have to give any notification, although it seems unlikely that they will choose to ignore this CSCE provision. The "voluntary" provision does give Moscow more latitude, and it is possible that it helped sell the agreement to the Soviet military.

The effect of CBMs on Soviet military activity depends in part on the degree of how specific Moscow is in its notification. The measure provides that notification convey some idea of the size and type of the units involved, rather than merely stating that an exercise involving more than 25,000 is projected. The requirements on area are

more vague. It will make a significant difference whether the Soviets state that an exercise will take place "in the western USSR" or whether they are more precise.

Most Soviet ground force exercises take place in the zone covered by the notification measure. Since it is now unusual for Western intelligence organizations to have 21 days notification of forthcoming Warsaw Pact exercises, the West should be better able to monitor Pact exercises and thereby get a better appreciation of Eastern military performance.

Of course the CBMs apply to both sides, and Moscow may benefit somewhat from prior notification of NATO exercises. More important, the Soviets may hope that CBMs will further diminish the sense of a Soviet threat in the West and will help to promote, albeit in a small way, the idea that NATO is irrelevant.

One potential consequence of incorporating CBMs in CSCE is that the Soviets will find it easier to argue that these topics should be excluded from the force reduction talks. If the Soviets insist on and carry this point, they would presumably gain a marginal advantage, because these matters would be treated by an all-European forum under an agreement that did not have the force of law, rather than under a binding agreement between the two military blocs.

The East Europeans

From the West's viewpoint, one of the purposes of CSCE was to promote centrifugal tendencies in Eastern Europe and to make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to keep the East Europeans on a tight leash. It is reasonably clear, however, that the process of negotiating CSCE did not encourage the East Europeans to embark on a more independent course. On the contrary, the Soviets used the conference format to tighten control by means of frequent consultations and coordination. The Warsaw Pact nations held regular strategy sessions and generally functioned as a unit, with each member assigned a particular substantive specialty. With the exception of Romania, they gave little evidence of discord or conflicting interests. One reason is that the Eastern European governments share the USSR's concern that domestic control takes precedence over the idea of "freer movement."

The one conspicuous exception to East European docility was Romania. In characteristic fashion, the Romanian delegation made a great show of flaunting its independence and defending its special interests and interpretations. The Romanians deviated from the Soviet position on a wide variety of issues. Bucharest tried hard, for example to strengthen follow-up provisions, with the obvious intent of holding the Soviets accountable for violations of the agreements.

In the end there was little wording Bucharest could cite as incorporating its concepts and the Romanians regularly backed away from potential showdowns with the Soviets. Nevertheless, the Romanians got a sympathetic hearing before a wide European audience and gained a greater understanding for their position. Bucharest will acquire some sustenance from the increased sense of shared interest among the non-aligned and incompletely aligned nations of Europe. Much the same can be said of the Yugoslavs, although they behaved less flamboyantly at the conference.

Beyond CSCE

At the first stage of the conference, in mid-1973, the Warsaw Pact proposed the creation of a standing consultative committee that would "follow-up" the agreements signed at the CSCE summit, and provide a permanent organization through which Moscow could continue to make its voice heard in West European affairs.

But as the negotiations progressed, the Soviets lost interest in the idea of a standing committee. In the closing weeks of the negotiations, when the first serious discussion of follow-up began, the Soviets abandoned it without a whimper. The text on follow-up that eventually emerged provides for a meeting in 1977 of sub-ministerial officials to review CSCE progress, and to consider other meetings, or even another conference.

In a discussion with a US representative on June 5, a Soviet delegate who specialized in the subject set forth what is probably an accurate outline of Moscow's current ambivalence on a follow-up mechanism. He stressed Moscow's

desire for a "politicized" follow-up, which would concern itself with broad questions of detente and international relations. At the same time he expressed distaste for a follow-up proposal that embodied a large number of technical and experts groups -- an obvious manifestation of Soviet fear that such groups would monitor the implementation of Basket III provisions.

With CSCE out of the way, at least until 1977, the Soviets will now turn to their multilateral fora to keep the process of detente moving forward. They are already talking about the necessity for complementing political detente with "military detente," and their public focus no doubt will now shift to Vienna and the MBFR negotiations.

But Moscow will feel itself under no special pressure to make concessions to the West in Vienna as a result of CSCE. The once tight linkage between the two negotiations has long since disappeared, and the West no longer has the option of trying to use Soviet intent in CSCE as a lever for progress in MBFR. Nor is it clear that the Soviets, who do seem to be more interested in the possible gains to be made at MBFR than they once were, are genuinely interested in an MBFR agreement any time soon.

The Soviets may also do more to promote regional agreements in Europe. Some manifestations of this have already been seen in the revival of Soviet interest in the long-dormant proposal for a nuclear-free zone in Scandinavia and the first tentative probes toward becoming involved in Nordic economic cooperation. It is conceivable that the Soviets may eventually undertake similar initiatives in the Mediterranean. On a broader front, they may revive their proposal for a world disarmament conference. A major thrust of Soviet activity in the post-CSCE era will be outside the sphere of official conferences and multilateral initiatives. In particular, the Soviets will push for greater trade union contacts in an effort to advance their idea of pan-European trade unionism.

The Soviets have some work to do within the Communist movement in Europe as a result of CSCE. They have been heavily engaged in organizing a meeting of the European Communist parties. One purpose of this meeting is to

strengthen Moscow's voice on the ideological front in anticipation of post-CSCE pressures. In addition, the Soviets would like to have a more influential voice in determining the priorities, tactics, and policies of the various West European Communist parties. The growth in the influence and the potential governing role of these parties gives Moscow more reason than before to do what it can to make sure that their activities contribute to, rather than complicate, Soviet policies.